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WHY THE CITY WENT WESTWARD.

(A DISCUSSION BEFORE THE SOCIETY APRIL 13, 1903.)

At the meeting of the Society held on the evening of April 13, 1903, the topic discussed was "Why the City Went Westward." Those taking part were Glenn Brown, J. Dudley Morgan, Allen C. Clark, W. B. Bryan and Hugh T. Taggart. Mr. Brown's remarks were illustrated by stereopticon slides. What was said by the several speakers in regard to the various phases of this subject follows.

L'ENFANT'S IDEA AS TO HOW THE CAPITOL BUILDING SHOULD FACE.

By J. DUDLEY MORGAN, M.D.

In opening my remarks I have to say that I had prepared myself with a few facts, intending to depend upon information to be obtained from the preceding speaker (who, I understand, is *non est*) to enable me to enlarge my discourse. I trust, therefore, the members present will take that into consideration in any criticism they may make of my remarks, especially in the direction of their brevity.

By close attention to a subject its importance is magnified in one's mind. This is to be observed in everyday business and professional life. The professor in the law and the medical school dilates upon his subject to such an extent that his hearers are asked to believe, as does the professor, that his subject is the most important in the curriculum. And this aberration of the professor's mind is well understood by his auditors.

Of course, I consider the division of the discussion leaves the whole question, the kernel of the nut, in my hands, as it includes L'Enfant's idea.

It is admitted that the "President's Palace" and "Congress House," as they were originally called, were located or drawn on L'Enfant's map, who exhibited it to General Washington in August, 1791, and by whose orders it was hung in the House of Representatives in December of the same year. Although the Capitol was not commenced until 1793, the quarries from which stone was to be taken for the Capitol had been obtained and bought by L'Enfant and the quarrying had been started as early as 1791, and the excavation, or the proposition for the further excavation of the Capitol, was laid down in the plans drawn by L'Enfant for 1792. Those are now in existence. L'Enfant in speaking of the excavations for the Capitol, used these words:

"The planting of the wall of the terrace fronting from Congress House towards the President's Palace and for the gradual ascent to the Federal Square"—

which was the Capitol Square—

"which will be made of earth from the foundation."

Also in this map, the original map of L'Enfant, was laid down the grand principal avenue, which was one hundred and sixty feet in breadth. This avenue was to be bordered on one side by the principal Executive Departments and mansions, many of which had been already allotted to foreign legations, one in particular I remember, the Portuguese Legation, on the north side near the Capitol. On the other side was to be a "Grand Canal made up of fresh flowing water coming from the base of the Capitol through a cascade twenty

feet in depth"—I am quoting now—" and fifty feet in breadth, into a reservoir; thence by three falls through the gardens to form the Grand Canal."

L'Enfant knew, and thought everyone else understood, that the Capitol was to face westward, and that the city would go likewise. We see this from the position that he gave to the Executive Buildings, the placement of the foreign legations this side of the Capitol and along the avenue, by laying out the Executive grounds, drives and gardens, and by the location of the equestrian statue of Washington, which was to be placed where the Monument now is, etc.

No one can read the letters of L'Enfant, or those written to him, without coming to the conclusion that he expected the city to go westward. In a letter to David Burns, dated Georgetown, December 21, 1791, he tells David Burns that his square, No. 171, would border on the grandest or best improvements of the city, and it was important that the mansion that David Burns should build there should be in keeping with those improvements. This was down by the present Corcoran Art Gallery.

In a letter which L'Enfant wrote to Thomas Jefferson March 11, 1791, shortly after L'Enfant arrived in Georgetown, he tells Jefferson that he rode over the surrounding country, taking in that part of the Federal City down by the river and in the region of Tiber Creek or Goose Creek, as he called it, and up by the Heights of Georgetown, and that there were many beautiful locations which seemed—I am trying to get the words exactly as he used them—"to rival with each other to command a beautiful view of the Potomac, and that the Heights above Georgetown absolutely command the whole." Replying to L'Enfant about a week after this in a letter from Philadelphia, Jefferson says:

“There are certainly considerable advantages on the Eastern Branch, but there are very strong reasons also in favor of the position between Rock Creek & Tiber independent of the face of the ground. It is the desire that the public mind should be in equilibrio between the two places till the President arrives, and we shall be obliged to you to endeavor to poise their expectation.”

In the notes of L’Enfant, I find that he had evidently remembered this injunction of Jefferson’s to poise the location between the central part of the city and that down by the Eastern Branch; and I pause right here to read one paragraph in relation thereto, a paragraph which has some bearing on the question here being discussed. This paper, which I exhibit, concerns L’Enfant’s estimates for the improvements of the Federal City for 1792, and throughout it has considerable reference to the President’s Palace and the Congress House, as, I have said, L’Enfant called them:—

“To build two good stone bridges”—

this, as I say, is one of the estimates of 1792—

“First, one over rock”—

he means Rock Creek—

“and one over the Canal. That over Rock Creek will be first engaged in, to effect a communication with the post road and for establishing necessary intercourse, the reducing the post road will fill the abutment and adjoining wharf, which wharf and another on the east branch at the nearest communication with Congress House will be established for landing materials and for equal encouragement of improvements in that part”—

Note these words—

“and for equal encouragement of improvements in that part”; that is the eastern part of the city.

Jefferson warned L'Enfant about distributing the improvements between Rock Creek and the Eastern Branch, just as the commissioners are now parceling out something here and something over there. That bridge over Rock Creek was referred to at the time as being one of the best in the country, a stone bridge, and the different improvements were to keep the public "in equilibrio" between the two sections, until the sale of all the lots had been completed. That was the question then—the sale of lots throughout the city and to prevent speculation.

On this map, in reference to that bridge, the stone bridge of which I spoke, I find the following: "A bridge superior to anything of the kind in America." That is the stone bridge over K Street. I suppose some of the abutments are there yet.

There is one other point to which I would like to call attention, while I am reading these notes of L'Enfant's, the first paragraph having some reference to the Capitol. In them the words of Old Major L'Enfant are very peculiar:

"The opening of the year 1792 in the Federal City should be directed to the following objects, first, to continue clearing the cellars and begin laying the foundations of the two principal buildings, they to be brought forward to such a stage as that they will be safe from injury the next winter, for which (those two objects) the number of men that will be necessary, as I said in the margin against each, is one hundred and fifty men."

One hundred and fifty men were needed to clear out the cellars of the President's House and Congress House, or, as he called it, "the cellars of the two principal buildings."

To show his faith in the growth of the city and the way in which he expected it to go, L'Enfant (this is

an argument "deductione"; I have nothing, of course, that says that L'Enfant absolutely said the city was going westward; it must be proved by deduction) purchased a lot on the first of October, 1791. This was not the same lot that the Commissioners offered to him later. I say this that the lots may not be confused. October 1, 1791, L'Enfant purchased Lot 30 in Square 127, which is on Seventeenth Street, between I and K, northwest. I think it takes in part of the present Farragut Flats. L'Enfant paid for that Lot 90 pounds, one fourth of which was paid in cash at the time of the purchase.

As I remarked in the beginning, I was supposed to discuss this question, after the reading of the paper by Mr. Glenn Brown; but the discussion taking precedence of the leading paper, it has rather put the cart before the horse. I have here for exhibition the receipt to Major L'Enfant for his lot on Seventeenth Street, between I and K. If there be any connections of his here—he was not a married man—they may come forward and lay claim to this valuable piece of ground.

THE PRESIDENT: Will the gentleman kindly read that paper in full?

DR. MORGAN: Yes.

"At a public Sale of Lots in the City of Washington, Peter Charles L'Enfant became purchaser of Lot number thirty in square number one hundred and twenty seven, for the consideration of ninety pounds current money of Maryland on the terms and conditions published at the same sale:

"And he hath accordingly paid one fourth part of the said consideration money and given Bond, with security, for the payment of the residue; on the payment whereof, with in-

terest, according to the said Bond of the said Peter Charles L'Enfant or his assigns will be entitled to a conveyance in fee.

“1st October 1791
Square No 127 Lot No. 30 } $\begin{array}{l} \text{W. JOHNSON} \\ \text{DD. STUART} \\ \text{DANL. CARROLL} \end{array}$ } Commrs.”